DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 153 885 SO 010 535

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TITLE Sex Stratification in Community Politics and Decision Making.
PUB DATE Sep 77
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society (Madison, Wisconsin, September 1-4, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Achievement; Community Study; *Decision Making; *Females; Literature Reviews; Local Government; Policy Formation; Political Attitudes; Political Influences; *Political Power; *Political Socialization; Research Projects; Sex Differences; *Sex Discrimination; *Sex Role; Socialization; Social Status; Sociology; Status; Status Need

ABSTRACT

Because men hold most of the high status, decision-making positions in American society, they have greater access to and control of property, power, and prestige. Women, conversely, are accorded low status because they fulfill the lower prestige roles of childbearing and childrearing. Although some city and county government positions are filled by women (school board members, clerks, treasurers, commissioners), the top elected positions are held by men. Two explanations are offered for the exclusion of women from top political office: (1) institutional barriers exist which effectively exclude women from entry into community politics and decision making; and (2) women are socialized into roles which encourage self-elimination from high status positions. Review of past studies of community power, politics, and decision making reveals that researchers have most often employed a role stratification or elitist approach. This approach does not give sufficient consideration to the overwhelming absence of women in community political leadership. Further research into community power structure should center on sexual stratification. A methodological procedure is proposed which would first identify political leaders in a semi-rural community that is of medium size. Then, the few women found in political leadership roles should be interviewed to ascertain socioeconomic status, political motivations, and perceived barriers to political entry. This procedure would result in better evaluation of a community's organizational structure and would also ascertain women's relative status in the structure compared to men's. (Author/DB)

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ED153885

Preliminary Draft.
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Series S. Rural Sociology

SEX STRATIFICATION IN COMMUNITY POLITICS AND DECISION MAKING

by

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September 1977 No. 77 S-2

ILLINOIS AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS STAFF PAPER

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SP 010 535

Paper presented at the annual meeting,
Rural Sociological Society,
September 1-4, 1977, Madison, Wisconsin

SEX STRATIFICATION IN COMMUNITY

POLITICS AND DECISION MAKING

Introduction and Problem Statement

In the male dominated U.S. society, men, through their virtual monopoly of high-status, decision-making roles in the economic, political and cultural spheres, have greater access to and control of the valued goods (i.e., power, prestige, property), while the predominant childbearing and childrearing roles of women are accorded low status and low prestige (Iglitizin, 1974; Walum, 1977). In the political sphere, women's marginal involvement in politics and decision-making can be easily documented (e.g. Boyd, 1968; Currell, 1974; Costantini and Craik, 1972; Hansen and others, 1976; Karnig and Walter, 1976; Krauss, 1974; Prewitt, 1970; Tolchin and Tolchin, 1974). A number of researchers maintain that women's largely apolitical role is one that they willingly accept (Almond and Verba, 1968; Duverger, 1955; Huber, 1976; Millet and Friedan in Tobias and others, 1969). However, women's limited participation in the political sphere may result from women's realistic assessment of their objective situation in the status hierarchy. Dahl (1961) proposes that variations in access to political resources and variations in political confidence, or estimates of the probability of succeeding in attempts to influence decision-making, bear upon how one develops his or her political resources. Dahl concludes that persons of low social standing tend to remove themselves from the contest for leadership, as they perceive that their chances of influence are low.

In the political office hierarchy traditions exist which are sex-based. At the level of city government some council and school board positions (as many as 15 percent) are filled by women, while at the county government level, women are most typically recorders, clerks, treasurers

and commissioners. Top elective positions are deferred to men (Boyd, 1968). Therefore, not only are there few women in politics but the few who are there tend to be limited in their options for public office.

This paper argues that institutional barriers exist which effectively exclude women from entry into community politics and decision-making. It will be argued that the exclusion may result from women's socialization into their "proper" roles with consequent self-elimination from high status positions, as well as through barriers that are directly external.

The following questions are those that will guide the discussion of this paper and those that the proposed investigation would hope to answer:

1. Do women play less of a role in politics than men?
2. Are there institutionalized barriers to women's entry into politics and decision-making?
3. Is there blatant sexism in politics? For whatever the reason, women are kept out of politics. Why this is so is what we will attempt to answer.

For the purposes of this analysis, political leaders will be defined by the criteria of the pluralistic model of leadership. The assumptions are that: (1) "leaders hold political or associational office, (2) leaders are recognized by the community at large as key decision-makers, (3) leaders are concerned only with those decisions related to official areas, and (4) group structure may not be present (certainly at least primary relations would be absent)" (Bonjean and Olson, 1970).

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for the proposed research is the community. The reason for the focus are several. First, the political and decision-making

structure of the community is easily observable. Secondly, it is community involvements which very often usher people into active politics (e.g., through voluntary association memberships, occupational ties, partisan activities, etc.). Third, Currell (1974) presents evidence that a majority of the female members of the British Parliament began their political careers as local officeholders. Therefore, it may well be that local politics serves as a proving ground for a portion of those who seek state and national elective offices. Fourth, women are somewhat more apt to hold local elective office than state or national office and the stereotype regarding women's interest in politics is that it is confined to local matters, such as schools and community medical care (Karnig and Walter, 1976; Krauss, 1974). Fifth, although research evidence is conflicting, the position of women in local politics seems to vary according to the characteristics of the community. Krauss (1974) reports that participation rates of women vary positively with the proportion of women and men professionals, the general economic affluence of the area, party competition and number of offices available, while varying inversely with the degree of prestige and power of the office, the amount of salary, urbanism and political bossism. Karnig and Walter (1976), on the other hand, report that women's participation in local policies varies little regardless of city size, region and community-wide affluence. Finally, women's recruitment into and participation in community decision-making (or exclusion from) has received little attention from researchers.

The many community sociologists who have studied power, politics and decision-making have tended to use a stratification or elitist theoretical approach (e.g., Hunter, 1953; The Lynds, 1929 and 1937; Vidich and Bensman, 1968). These studies have identified monolothic power structures in which

decision-making is concentrated in the hands of a small group of economic dominants, while local politicians serve only to execute their policies. From the elitist perspective, it is assumed that power structures are covert, that co-participants regularly communicate and associate with one another, that its members remain relatively stable over a long period of time, that there is a high degree of consensus among the elites in reaching decisions affecting the community and that political officeholders are merely the "puppets" of the power figures. Moreover, it is assumed that the power structure exercises control of the political apparatus of the community in order to maintain economic control of the community. A few women have been identified in these studies as "social leaders" although none appear in the "upper-limits" group of decision-makers.

The pluralist perspective proposes that community leadership is decentralized, specialized and fluid, or changing (e.g., Dahl, 1961; Presthus, 1964). Further, the pluralist model assumes that community decision-makers are recognized by the community at large, that they often hold elective office and that decisions are confined to matters of public record. Some pluralists have reported a small proportion of female political officeholders. In the pluralist model, however, which assumes widely dispersed leadership, it is especially striking that women are so overwhelmingly absent from power positions.

Politicization

Political socialization and mobilization theory holds that exposure to certain stimuli shapes one's participation in the active political stratum of the community. Socialization experiences and one's environmental milieu during childhood, as well as one's adult roles will help to determine political activity (Prewitt, 1970).

Ninety percent of the councilmen Prewitt (1970) surveyed cited family ties, school experiences and exposure to politics during childhood as the events leading to their interest in politics. Currell (1974) found that, among the female members of the British Parliament, a majority were raised in politically active families. For most women, however, their largely apolitical stance and lowered sense of political efficacy seem rooted in childhood socialization experiences which assign women to "expressive" roles--to use Parsonian terminology. Whereas females are taught to be passive and nurturing, males are taught "instrumental" roles which emphasize task-orientation and aggressiveness. Studies show that, even as children, females generally exhibit less knowledge of and less interest in politics than males (Greenstein, 1961; Iglitzin, 1974). Women come to view politics as a males only profession.

As an adult: "It is an individual's location in a network of social-political relationships that determines whether family background, educational experiences, occupational choices, leisure time activities or community conditions 'expose' (one) to political stimuli in very unequal amounts" (Prewitt, 1970). The communications networks of women, which most often revolve around their childbearing and childrearing roles, place them in isolation from the relevant political relationships (Jacquette, 1974). Flora and Lynn (1974) found that mothers displayed less political efficacy than nonmothers and that differences increased among women of higher social status. The environments of men, whose lives center on their occupations rather than the family, expose them to a wider variety of political stimuli. Even for women who work outside the home, however, sex segregation into predominantly feminine occupations places women in communications networks which probably are not as politically relevant as those of many men. Socialization into limited roles seems an important factor in

self-elimination of women from many types of political activity.

Krauss (1974) provides the following descriptive statement regarding the extent of women's political participation:

> Tensions brought by the interaction between the traditional gender role and the rhetoric of democracy in the home, school and cultural milieu have been resolved by (a) increased women's voting and political behavior within the confines of the gender role, which in turn results in (b) few inputs of political demands, (c) few women elected to political office and (d) few policy changes which would eliminate legal barriers and facilitate more options and hence give feedback of a broadened gender role.

Though the above provides the general statement, what about the few women who do become politicians? Have their backgrounds been different from most women's and what were the precipitating events which led to their interest in politics? This research will attempt to answer such questions.

Avenues of Entry into Politics

Recruitment into politics is concerned with the manner in which political ambitions are channeled. Apprenticeships provide training prior to the individual's holding elective office and provide evidence to the institutional sector of an individual's political competence. Recruitment and apprenticeship then, serve to screen and sort within the politically active sphere of the community and recruitment patterns reflect the social values of those who control recruitment channels. Those who control the nominating processes and apprenticeship positions tend to perpetuate their own kind, and are in a position to apply discriminatory criteria to persons outside the dominant group (Prewitt, 1970).

Political life-chances are not equal among all groups but rather are disproportionately favorable to the dominant socioeconomic strata. Politicians are high SES (Milbrath, 1965; Patterson and Boynton, 1969; Prewitt, 1970). Advanced education, high social status and a prestige occupation serve both

as self-selection criteria and as demonstrated competence to enter the politically active stratum. On all these criteria, the status of women is generally lower than that of men. However, the few women who enter politics are assumed to be highly educated and from upper middle income backgrounds. Whether this is true for women in local politics will be a part of this investigation.

Occupations: One's occupation can provide an especially important link to political resources. Businessmen and lawyers are the dominant recruits into politics and are drawn in numbers far exceeding their proportional total in the occupational structure (Milbrath, 1965; Prewitt, 1970). Women comprise only a small minority in these occupations, thus removing most women from one of the vital communications networks and from the feeder occupations. Among British and American women, legislators are drawn primarily from the educational field (Currell, 1974; Jacquette, 1974). Whether female politicians at the local level are primarily from the educational field is not well-established, although evidence suggests that women who are politically active concentrate in the health, education and welfare areas (Boyd, 1968).

It appears, moreover, that women who enter politics pursue it as a full-time career, whereas men pursue politics only part-time, while pursuing other economic interests (Jacquette, 1974). "Is women's constriction in their occupational options the most important reason for their difficult entry into politics, and is their economic position the reason women have fewer occupational options once in politics?" seem the pretinent questions regarding the occupational issue.

Organizational Membership: Social participation in voluntary associations and other civic affairs is the primary recruitment avenue and training ground

of the politically active, especially in nonpartisan communities (Almond and Verba, 1965; Currell, 1964; Milbrath, 1965; Prewitt, 1970). In this country women's participation in voluntary associations is almost as high as that of men, and Almond and Verba (1965) found that a higher proportion of American women than men had held leadership positions in voluntary associations. Nonetheless, sexual stratification is evident among voluntary associations. Many are sex-based, and women's organizations tend to be affective, or recreational, in purpose, while men's tend to be task-oriented, community control oriented and power oriented. Those that are all or predominatly male are accorded higher prestige in the community (e.g., Hunter's ranking of Regionals City's influential organizations) than women's organizations. Key male organizations are important training grounds and pathways into politics (Prewitt, 1970). However, women's organizations do not appear to have that same access.

The League of Women Voters, which is the leading women's political pressure group, relies on influence strategies that might be termed "traditionally feminine." The informal letter writing campaigns, coffee hours with legislators and other "cajoling" activities to influence politicians have left the members "political virgins," to use Gruberg's (1968) term. Friedan (in Tobias and others, 1969) comments that they ". . . have remained pure and on the sidelines, doing great studies, but not doing a damned thing to change society." The League's nonpartisan activites have left it without a decision-making voice in politics.

Women's auxiliaries to men's organizations is another phenomenon clearly suggesting sexual stratification and the minority group status of women in voluntary association memberships. Probably no male auxiliaries to female organizations exist. And although women's auxiliaries are sometimes established with the intention of safeguarding the interests of women, their very

isolation into a group lacking autonomy and executive function serves to perpetuate the institutionalization of sexual inequality (Currell, 1974). The past answer seems clear. But one must ask if such organizations are now providing training grounds for women's entry into politics, or do they merely serve to divert politically aware and able women from leadership positions.

Partisan Politics: Partisan involvements are another important mode of entry into public office (13 percent in Prewitt's 1970 study). Women's activity in party politics, however, often ends with roles of volunteer organizer and fund-raiser. Women who are political party actives are much less likely than men to cite a desire to run for public office as one of the reasons for working for a political party (Costantini and Craik, 1972; Tolchin and Tolchin, 1974). From their survey of party leaders in California, Costantini and Craik (1972) contract "the public office versus intraparty career styles and the self-serving (public office, power and influence) versus public-serving (concern for the party, its candidates and its program)" motivations of men and women as reflective of sex role differences similar to family roles. The "expressive" or supportive function of women and the "instrumental" or achieving function of men, which reflect traditional sex role ideology, are as pervasive in political party activities as in other areas of men's and women's life styles (Boyd, 1968; Costantini and Craik, 1972; Krauss, 1974; Millet in Tobias and others, 1969).

The question becomes how much are women's ambitions tempered by their assessments of their chances to fill party decision-making roles and to become elected representatives. Women are often the window-dressing at national party conventions, and women seem to have difficulty in gaining a position on a party's slate of candidates for public office. Case study reports

of women who have attained state and national political office indicate that partyleaders often discourage or try to block the candidacy of women aspirants. Funds which are ususally provided to back the party's primary election winner have sometimes been withheld from female primary victors. Furthermore, a number of women who have been successfully elected to office report exclusion from activity in the party hierarchy; Martha Griffiths of Michigan is a case in point whose ostracism from the state's Democratic Party machine has continued throughout her career in Congress (Tolchin and Tolchin, 1974). In Britain, Currell (1974) found that, for many of the women's first election attempts, their parties had slated them in districts in which the party nominee's chances of winning were slim.

Little has been examined regarding the obstacles encountered by women who seek local office. Karnig and Walter (1976) conclude, however, that the more pervasive problem for women is in becoming candidates for office rather than in winning elections. Almost fifty percent of the women who ran for office were elected, but eighty percent of the council posts were conceded to men. Of course, from these data one cannot know whether party leaders block women's candidacy or whether there is a combination of other factors that preclude women's running for political office. With the proposed study one would hope to establish those reasons.

Other Involvements: Individuals who feel a sense of personal commitment to the community, many of whom are long-time residents, often become the political officeholders. Such individuals are concerned about protecting their investments in the community, whether that includes a home, children in school, business interests or simply one's investment in moving to a community. Community wide political events about which some residents feel a high degree of personal involvement may be precipitous of entry into

politics. Community crises in which residents may feel threatened by change that is immanent serve to agitate and activate some individuals to seek elective office (Dahl, 1961; Prewitt, 1970; Vidich and Bensman, 1968). The concept of stake or the degree of economic or other direct interest which produces a deeper involvement in politics, is operative here. Jacquette (1974) contends that until women's issues were politicized, women did not have a real stake in the political process, except in relation to involvements in their children's schooling. The question this research would like to answer is whether women are increasingly being brought into decision-making roles via their interest in women's rights issues.

Proposed Methodology

Ultimately, a comparative study would be the goal in examining sex stratification in community politics. However, since women's participation in the political sphere of the community has not been systematically approached prior to this time, the proposed research will be exploratory in nature. A secondary concern of the investigation is to determine women's roles in politics in a comparatively rural area and, therefore, a county with cities ranging from 50,000 to 1,000 in population and one that is outside an SMSA will be selected as the unit of analysis. The choice of a county as the unit of study is for the purpose of including the two forms of local government, the county and city. A demographic profile of the county and the cities within, which shows male/female breakdowns of labor force participation rates, median income, median education, the occupational structure and so forth, the communities' economic structures and the formal government structures, will be provided. Thus, any differences in the characteristics of the cities within the county may be correlated with the relative political status of women in each.

Seemingly, if women are at all represented among the decision-makers of the community, the pluralistic approach would allow them maximum opportunity to be located. Therefore, an event analysis will be one of the methodological approaches taken. The important issues facing the communities involved will be identified through newspaper reports, minutes of board and council meetings, government documents and participant observation in local political meetings. Such historical and participant observation research will also be the methods of identifying community decision-makers. The arbitrary decisions in using this approach such as, number of important issues and time span to be covered, will be made so as to allow a temporal comparison of data (Aiken and Mott, 1970). The second method proposed is the positional approach, which simply identifies political officeholders and elective and appointive boards and commissions. Any women identified by either of these methods will be interviewed to determine their background characteristics, their political motivations, any perceived barriers to their entry into politics and their perceptions of their own and other women's influence in the community decision-making arena. The rank of the offices occupied by women within the political office hierarchy and the proportion of women officeholders and decision-makers will be provided as descriptive data.

The political relevance of voluntary associations will be determined by looking at the stated purpose of each organization in the unit studied. Secondly, community leaders (i.e., heads of voluntary associations and political officeholders) will form a panel of judges who will be asked to choose and rank the politically important organizations in the community. Thirdly, a random sample of community residents will be interviewed and asked to rank the organizations in the community that are important to the community's political leaders. From these lists, an overall ranking of

political importance will be made. Prestige, power and visibility will be the criteria used to rank the organizations. The organizations will then be classified as predominantly male or female. As a next step in the analysis, the leadership (i.e., presidents and vice-presidents) of the politically important organizations will be identified. Temporal factors, how many men, how many women, will be examined.

It is hoped that through the various methodological approaches women's position in the political arena can be delineated. Rather than mere conjecture, then, women's motivations and activities in the political arena can be identified in more concrete terms.

Summary and Conclusions

According to stratification theory, sex-based social inequalities exist which give men greater access to and control of valued goods than women. In the political sphere sexual inequality results in very few women holding political office and occupying other important decision making roles in the community. While community political leadership has been a much researched topic, the overwhelming absence of women as decision-makers is a fact researchers tend to ignore. The proposed research would systematically examine sexual stratification in local government, or community, politics.

The contention of this paper has been that barriers exist which keep women out of politics. Barriers can be internal, occurring through socialization processes which emphasize expressive, or passive and nurturing, roles for women, while emphasizing instrumental or task-oriented and aggressive roles for men. The end result is a lowered sense of political efficacy among women which tends toward their self-elimination from the politically active stratum. In their childbearing and childrearing roles, women tend to be isolated from political networks and a high degree of exposure to political stimuli. Men, on the other hand, are exposed to the relevant communications networks.

It has been argued that barriers to women's entry into politics exist because women are not found in large numbers in the occupations which provide the political recruits. Women's

voluntary association memberships seem to provide little access to politics. Women's organizations tend to be recreational, whereas men's tend to be task-oriented and politically relevant. Further, sex segregation by organizational membership tends to place women in a subordinate role to men, as men's organizations are accorded higher prestige and often serve as political training grounds. Women in partisan politics are confined largely to roles supportive of men and seem to find it difficult to gain the support of the party hierarchy in seeking political office. With regard to personal commitment and community conditions, the question arises as to whether women actually have a stake in government.

Methodological procedures have been proposed which would first identify the community's political leaders. The women who are found in political leadership roles in the community would be interviewed to ascertain background data (i.e. socio-economic status, political motivations, perceived barriers to their entry into politics). A procedure has been proposed to study the community's organizational structure and women's relative status in it compared to men's.

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